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ABSTRACT

Inservice education for teachers of English as a Second Language in India is discussed, focusing on the problem of teacher resistance to change in teaching practice. First, the need for inservice teacher education in the Indian context is examined, noting that standards of both student and teacher English language proficiency have been declining. Two specific challenges to Indian inservice teacher education are identified: convincing teachers of the desirability and feasibility of change; and improving teachers' English communication skills without giving offense. A model of inservice ESL teacher training, characterized by encouragement of personal growth and a climate supporting expression of participants' feelings, is described. The model consists of four instructional phases: (1) open discussion of participants' teaching problems and constraints; (2) a group advanced language exercise that is later revealed to trainees as a potential teaching technique; (3) reflection on the experience and elicitation of trainee perspectives and theories; and (4) an opportunity for trainees to design tasks to suit their own teaching situations, with guidance and technical support. Comparison with an existing program using a similar technique suggests that this approach is more efficient of time and uses a more effective approach to establishing participant rapport. (MSE)

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# Coping with Teacher Resistance: Insights from Inset Programs

V Saraswathi

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# COPING WITH TEACHER RESISTANCE: INSIGHTS FROM INSET PROGRAMMES

V SARASWATHI

## 1. The Need for INSET Programmes in India:

The Indian ELT scene is full of paradoxes. Millions of Indian boys and girls study English as a compulsory second language in schools and colleges. The students graduating from elitist English medium schools emerge as near-native speakers of English, who could take examinations like TOEFL, or ELTS in their stride. On the other hand, there are a large number of school-leavers, who have pursued their education through regional language medium schools, and are unable to write a single grammatically correct sentence. Both these categories of students sit in the same class when they enrol for their degree courses. The English teacher faces a dilemma - he cannot please both.

The weak learners, though confused and discouraged, somehow manage to pass the examination, thanks to the heavy weightage allotted to content and memory. They master the art of camouflage and successfully manage to demonstrate a competence in English which they never possess. While the brighter learners enrol for coveted courses like Engineering, Medicine or Business Management, the weaker learners are left with no other option but to become teachers. This is facilitated by the fact that a teacher of English in the Indian school need not necessarily be a graduate in English language and literature. The weaker-learner-turned-teacher is now asked to do the impossible - to teach the English language, which he himself has not mastered. While referring to deteriorating standards of English, we mainly think of students. A closer analysis of the situation, however, reveals that the teacher's English has also started deteriorating. The trainers in India have a formidable task - in addition to developing the trainees' teaching skills, they also need to take care of their linguistic skills. INSET programmes have therefore become the urgent need of the day.

The above discussion, however, should not create the impression that ELT experts in India are unaware of this. In fact some Indians have distinguished themselves as the best speakers and writers of English. Further there is enough ELT expertise in India to enable her to seek indigenous solutions. The C.I.E.F.L Hyderabad, for instance, has kept pace with current trends in ELT. Their project English 150, a remedial course for college entrants, is a case in point. The Tamil

Nadu Textbook Society has started implementing an innovative approach to Materials design, wherein a team of five people are appointed to design a textbook. An ELT expert, with a strong ELT background is chosen as the chairperson, to be assisted by four practising teachers with some ELT training.

These attempts at innovation, however, fail to yield the expected results for the simple reason that teachers are not prepared for change. There are no orientation programmes to familiarise them with the new approaches. Teachers with a few years of experience develop a sense of complacency and confidence. They feel that they have mastered the art of teaching and that there is nothing more for them to learn. They resist change as it shatters their sense of security. Often they fail to understand the rationale of suggested changes. They therefore reject innovations without making any effort to understand them. Their irrefutable argument is : "The method through which my teacher taught me English is good enough for my learners. If it has worked for me, why won't it work for my learners?"

**2. The Challenge of Teacher Education in India.**

The Challenge before teacher educators in India is two-fold. They have to convince teachers of the desirability and feasibility of change. They also have to improve the teachers' communication skills in English without hurting their ego.

Given the choice, teachers in India would prefer not to attend INSET Programmes. They regard it as a waste of time, an insult to their ego, and an infringement on their liberty. If they do attend INSET programmes, it is because they are forced to. The universities stipulate attendance at two INSET programmes - each of a month's duration - as a necessary requirement for increment and promotion. At the school level, result oriented administrators compel their teachers to attend such programmes. Like Blake's Schoolboy, they go unwillingly to School. This is further aggravated by the fact that INSET programmes are usually arranged outside class hours or over the weekend. While school teachers come for INSET programmes chafing with irritation and defiance, college teachers have a totally different perspective since they are sent 'on duty' during term days to attend the programme. It offers them an escape from the humdrum of the daily chore of teaching and the pleasure of returning to their student days.

On the first day of the training programme, the attitude writ large on the face of every teacher is: "What are you going to tell me that I don't know already?". The primary duty of every teacher-educator is to change this attitude. Even if he manages to convince them regarding the desirability of innovations, teachers still

assert categorically: "But this won't work in my classroom". This is the trump card which makes many a novice teacher educator shudder in despair.

The situation is made more complex when such defiance is coupled with an inability to make a proper assessment of one's self. Most teachers are not aware of the fact that their own English is of a very poor standard and that they provide very bad models for their own learners. Any direct suggestion that their English needs improvement, hurts their ego and they are unable to digest it. When INSET programmes continue to be optional there could be no better way of dissuading teachers from attending such programmes!

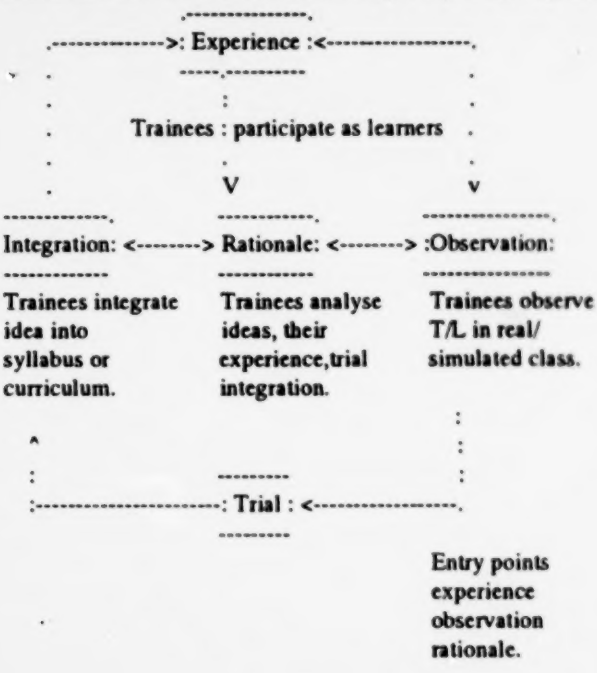
### 3. Meeting the Challenge

How does one meet the challenge of convincing teachers who refuse to be convinced? Primarily it requires a change in the attitude of the trainers themselves. A person-centered approach, as defined by Carl Rogers, may perhaps be the best answer. He says: "The central hypothesis of this approach can briefly be stated: It is that the individual has within him or herself vast resources for self-understanding, for altering his or her self-concept, attitudes and self-directed behaviour and that these resources can be tapped if only a definable climate of facilitative psychological attitudes can be provided" (Rogers 1980). In order to create such a climate, the trainer needs to develop the qualities of empathy, acceptance and authenticity. Empathy requires the capacity and willingness to understand someone else from his point of view. Acceptance implies readiness to hear the trainees without judging them. Authenticity is genuineness or absence of hypocrisy.

### 4. Towards a Model for INSET Programmes

In accordance with the humanistic principles of psychology, where the trainer becomes a facilitator, we prefer the notion of "Teacher Development" to "Teacher Training". Ian McGrath (1986 p.2) says, "Teacher Development is a life-long, autonomous process of learning and growth, by which as teachers we adapt to changes in and around us and enhance our awareness, knowledge and skills in personal, interpersonal and professional aspects of our lives". In other words, Teacher Development seeks to encourage personal growth or evolution and creates a favourable climate in which course participants feel free to talk about their own perceptions and feelings.

In designing our Teacher Development programmes we have drawn inspiration from the E-R-O-T-I model outlined by Tony O'Brien (1981 p.59)




The different features of the model are briefly summarised below:

Experience : Trainees take the role of learners and become aware of what learners experience.

Observation : The Trainees observe the new approach in operation to be able to take a more detached, critical look at their effect.

Trial : The Trainees are given an opportunity to try out the new idea for themselves in a setting where making a mistake will not matter very much.

Integration : The Trainees are encouraged to fit these ideas into the existing set up, in order that they may have a long -term acceptance.

Rationale : The Trainer explains the new ideas and the theories behind them.

Drawing insights from the model, we have adapted it to suit our context. During the past one year, we have been trying out this programme with several trainees, at different levels and situations. The feedback has generally been encouraging. We shall now present the four phases of a typical session.

**Phase I Caring and Sharing : Trainees' Problems**

As pointed out earlier, most trainees arrive at an INSET programme with negative attitudes. They are either complacent or indifferent. This is further aggravated when trainers present a programme outline, in planning which the trainees have not been taken into confidence. Realizing this lacuna in most INSET programmes and the need to break the ice, we adopt the following strategy: the first task assigned to the trainees is a discussion of their problems in teaching and the constraints under which they work. After discussing these in groups, they report it at the plenary. This helps in the release of tension and mellows down the rigidity in their outlook. If the trainers are willing to lend a patient hearing to their woes, then perhaps, the trainees too have a moral responsibility to listen to what they say. This general climate is further strengthened when we offer them a "Listener's Choice" - that is, we express a willingness to accommodate whatever agenda the trainees have brought with them. Experience has shown that this doesn't turn out to be a formidable task. Very often the expectations of trainees coincide with the plans of experienced trainers. Where they don't, the little extra trouble is worth the effort. The "Yes...but" approach is certainly more effective than "The No....it can't be done" attitude. Negativism breeds negativism. Training, like teaching, involves the creation of conditions congenial for learning to take place. The duration of the first phase varies according to the length of the whole programme.

**Phase II Advanced Language Task**

This is the most crucial phase. The basic principle is to treat the trainees as advanced learners, which in fact, they are. While enabling them to experience at first hand what an activity is like, this phase also provides them opportunities to engage in communication and thus simultaneously improve their own English. We shall illustrate the rationale of this phase with the help of a sample task.

This task has always proved popular with trainees. It is a simple game usually played in almost every other party. One of the trainees is asked to volunteer to come to the front of the class. The others are now free to 'shoot' questions at him, which demand either a 'Yes' or 'No' as answer. The volunteer should answer

the questions without actually using the words 'Yes' or 'No' or their variants. For instance if someone asks a question like "Do you want to answer this question ?", they should avoid a straightforward 'Yes' or 'No' but give an evasive reply like "Of course I do" or "I am not sure". Trainees often drive the volunteer into a tight corner by posing questions like, "How do you pronounce the word "Y-E-S" or "What is the first letter of the word "Snake" ?". During a game lasting 5 to 7 minutes, at least 50 Yes-No questions are generated. There is generally a lot of interest and participation. In fact more and more trainees volunteer to be guinea pigs and it often becomes difficult to curb their enthusiasm and bring the game to a close.

The trainees have been so involved in the game-like quality of their activity that when they are told that this could be a good task for giving meaningful practice in the use of Yes-No questions, they are in for a mild shock. Having personally experienced the joy of participating in the game, they have no hesitation about its effectiveness with their own learners. In fact many of them have come and told me at the end of the session, "I am just waiting to try this out with my students!".

In order to make this activity more effective as a teacher-training strategy, we ask a small group of trainees to take the role of observers and record the proceedings as well as the language generated during the activity. This enables them to realize the potential of such a task. They have a first hand experience of current trends in ELT viz. the value of interaction, the challenge of problem-solving, focus on communication etc. These observers later report their findings to the whole class.

An additional advantage of choosing an advanced language task is that it proves to be a fluency activity for the trainees. One of the salient features of Indian English is to transform a statement into a question by adding the tag "No" at the end: (eg)" You are angry , no?" "You are coming, no?". This is a literal translation from the mother-tongue. The above activity provides trainees opportunities to get out of their fossilization and frame grammatically correct Yes-No questions.

This approach to providing trainees practice in language use, has psychological validity as well. As long as they play the game, the trainees are not aware of the fact that this is a language activity; further they do not have the faintest notion that this may be aimed at improving their own linguistic skills. While a good teacher-trainer enables the trainees to understand the value of this activity for language-learning, it may be wiser on his part to refrain from telling them that he

was incidentally helping them to improve their own English. For, no teacher of English in India, however poor his competence may be, is ready to accept that it is so.

**Phase III Elicitation**

During this phase, the trainer has to skilfully effect a transition: trainees who have temporarily assumed the role of advanced learners, once again come back to their original role as teachers. They are asked to reflect on their experience and spell out the various features of the activity which made it an enjoyable learning experience, different from what usually happens in their own classrooms. In this process of elicitation the observer trainees have a significant role to play, by supplementing the insights that the others have gained from their experience. Various features of a communicative task are spelt out: (eg) learner-centredness; focus on communication; scope for interaction; problem-solving approach; learning by doing; relaxed atmosphere etc. It is interesting that in most of our programmes, teachers are able to think of the above features on their own, with very little prompting from the trainers. This confirms the need for respecting teachers' intuitions or sense of plausibility. From having been active learners they are now transformed into intelligent theory constructors.

This phase highlights another area that has been engaging the attention of teacher trainers: namely, the role of theory in teacher education. While trainers are beginning to lose faith in theoretical input for its own sake, it is ironical that many of our trainees still feel happy listening to a solid lecture on theoretical perspectives. They even take down notes very sincerely. However it has been established beyond doubt that such lecture notes safely stay within the two covers of the notebook and hardly get translated into classroom reality. Realizing the importance of theory in teacher education, Esther Ramani has experimented with "Theorising from the Classroom" and established that teachers have intuitions which need to be respected.

Such theorising from experience certainly leaves a more lasting impression than any lecture on theory prior to the activity. While for most teachers, this process of elicitation offers a means of confirming their own hypotheses on the art of teaching, for others it opens up new and exciting horizons.

The first two phases cater to a large extent, to the expectations of trainees from developing countries, as outlined by Anne Wiseman (1990 : p.10)

- to see a 'model' lesson
- "a way of making my lessons more interesting"
- practical tips for the classroom
- a ready made how-to-do-it guide
- to gain knowledge about teaching theories (with less emphasis on the practice)
- "to improve my English"
- proof that a "new" method works.

It may seem too ambitious to try to cater to all these needs through one activity alone; however, we make a modest claim that the activity outlined above does satisfy, to a large extent, all these expectations. Let us briefly examine how this is possible.

This activity may be regarded as a model lesson, better than one involving real learners. In the usual demonstration lessons, the learners have the primary focus of attention and the trainees sit at the back as observers. While in a demonstration lesson the trainees remain passive spectators till the 'show' is over, in our activity they are turned into active participants. Further, while the general attitude to a demonstration lesson is critical, our activity successfully manages to pre-empt them of this critical armour because they have just exhibited their intense involvement in the activity and will now face the risk of exposing themselves as hypocrites if they say they did not find it enjoyable.

The trainees do find in this activity "a way of making their own lessons interesting ", for they have themselves found the activity enjoyable. The trainees reflecting on their experience, together with the observer trainees , will be able to provide a ready made how-to-do-it guide or practical tips for the classroom. The elicitation phase enables them 'to gain knowledge about teaching theories". Usually after the elicitation, we give a mini lecture summarizing all the points which emerged during the phase and adding some more which may not have been thought of. This is useful as a means of consolidating what has been learnt in the case of most trainees. Others who feel happy with the traditional lecture method and look upon anything else as trivial and undignified, find that their feelings of hurt and disappointment at being treated as children, are assuaged to a large extent. At last there is something concrete for them 'to take down' and 'keep for ever'.

With regard to the expectation relating the improvement of their own English, most Indian trainees, as already pointed out, do not share this; however Indian teacher trainers do regard it as one of their major objectives. Such activities as outlined above enable us to avoid a confrontation between the expectations of

trainees and trainers. While enabling trainees to engage in fluency activities, we are careful not to highlight the fact that simultaneously they are also engaged in the process of improving their own English. With regard to the last expectation, viz "proof that a new method works", nothing more needs to be said than that the trainees have seen it working with themselves. They are now convinced of the desirability of such activities in their classrooms, even though some of them may still retain reservations about their feasibility in their own context. This question is more directly addressed in the next phase.

**Phase IV Trainees Design Tasks to Suit Their Contexts**

What the trainees take back with them to their own classrooms is more important than what they do during the programme. Many INSET programmes generate cordial interaction between trainers and trainees. But once the trainees go back to their classes, they resort to the good old traditional methods and all the inspiration they received at the training programme somehow seems to vapourize. They are not sure how to apply their newly acquired knowledge to their own context. This is the reason why they often come up with the statement "All this may be desirable but certainly not feasible in our context ". To read between the lines, the implication seems to be "I don't know how to apply these insights in my classroom". The fourth phase helps a committed teacher to overcome this mental block by guiding him to explore how what is desirable could be made feasible.

We usually plan this phase as a group activity. Trainees take up their own syllabi/textbooks, and design activities based on them, suitable to their learners, on the basis of their experience in Phase I and their reflections in Phase II. Then they prepare posters on their tasks and display them. Each group vies with the other to prepare the most attractive poster.

The advantages of this phase are many. First and foremost, teachers enjoy the challenge of materials design, for which the system offers them no opportunity. They realise that though the goal is fixed, the means could vary; within the constraints of a prescribed syllabus they could still create a certain amount of freedom within the four walls of the classroom.

The group activity enables teachers from different institutions to come together and share their problems. This sharing itself is an exciting experience, in the absence of any recognised forum/centre for teachers in India. The realisation that fellow-teachers share similar problems gives them self-confidence as teachers.

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With proper guidance and support, these groups could emerge as constructive pressure groups that could have an impact on syllabus design, evaluation etc. With autonomy for schools and colleges becoming more widespread, there is a greater possibility of making their voice heard.

The direct supervision and guidance of the expert during the process of materials design, is of immense value. Much needed clarifications are sought. The practical, down-to-earth nature of the task enables the trainees to apply the principles they have learnt, to their own context; in other words, to translate theory into practice. Generally during this phase defiances crumble down. From the belligerent "This won't work for me" syndrome, trainees unconsciously move to the more positive perspective of "How shall I make this work for me ?". The keenness to do better than other groups acts as a further incentive.

In a number of INSET programmes for college teachers in Tamil Nadu, India, we have tried this phase with success. Trainees experience a sense of achievement since they now become active "doers" instead of remaining mere passive listeners. In their feedback they often rate this as the best phase of the programme.

This phase also caters to two of the trainee expectations listed by Wiseman: a readymade how-to-do-guide and practical tips for the classroom. By the end of the session they have a task bank consisting of a number of tasks which can be taken to the classroom straightaway. This offers scope for the much-talked-about follow-up activities of any training programme. By the time they have tried out the whole set of tasks in their classes, they begin to derive confidence in this approach.

## 5. Conclusion

Before closing, we would like to compare our model with the E.R.O.T.I model already referred to and the Six Category Intervention Analysis originally developed by John Heron at the Human Potential Research Project at Surrey University in 1983.

While our model includes all the features of the EROTI model there are certain differences: we have added the first phase of caring & sharing and combined experience and observation in Phase II, and Trial and Integration in Phase IV. In a humanistic approach to teacher training, we feel that the whole programme might collapse without the ice-breaking session where the trainees are given an

opportunity to give vent to their feelings. Instead of keeping the phase of observation as separate we have built it into the phase of experience itself : as self-observation by most trainees and non-participant observation by a few. The interaction between these two is always interesting and productive.

On similar lines we have combined Trial and Integration in the last phase when trainees design their own materials. In fact, this is preparation for the trial in the classroom, an essential pre-requisite for the Trial. Trainees attempt to integrate these insights into their own syllabus and curriculum.

While we agree that every stage in the E.R.O.T.I model is important, we have arrived at this working compromise as more economical, given the short span of time for INSET programmes and the practical difficulties in monitoring follow-up programmes.

Looking back, we find that our approach has much in common with the Six Category Intervention Analysis. The facilitative dimension of the model consisting of cathartic, catalytic and supportive categories broadly corresponds to our Phases I, II, III and IV. The cathartic phase "clears tensions, feelings, in order to move forward, to rechannel energy in a more purposeful way, to flush out negative feelings, vent stress, in order to think and feel more creatively"(*). The Catalytic category which "elicits self discovery talk, opens new doors, facilitates self-direction"(*), corresponds to our Phases II & III. The last phase in our approach corresponds to the supportive category which "enhances, validates and affirms the fundamental worth of the trainee in an authentic caring way", and "affirms the trainee's potential for growth and change"(*). This raises the self-esteem of the trainee and enables him to move forward.

The above research project is based on the axiom that language learning and language teacher education share two areas in common: both deal with language; both are skills. We have attempted to exploit this commonality by training through learning: that is while they consciously focus on the methodology of learning English they are enabled to engage in communication that will improve their own English. While we do admit that this is not the only (or the best) strategy for teaching/training we are happy that it works.

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(*) The quotations with this mark (*) are from a handout prepared by Adrian Underhill for The British Council Summer School on "Training the Trainers" at Exeter during July-August 1990.

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## Appendix: Sample Tasks

Task 1 : Focus on writing

The Teacher draws the imaginary map of a country on the blackboard. Students copy them and mark any four places on the map. (e.g.) rivers, cities, mountains. Then they write a description of the location of each place. These descriptions (not maps) are exchanged with neighbours. Students work in pairs and try to figure out the location from the description. They then check each other's maps and discuss the inadequacies in the descriptions.

[I learnt this task from Ron V White at the British Council RSF Seminar, Jaipur, India]

Task 2 Dictogloss : Focus on Listening

The teacher reads a passage at normal speed and students attempt to take it down. After the dictation, they work in groups and try to arrive at the original passage by collating each others' narrations.

[From R.Wajnryb: Grammar Dictation, OUP 1990]

Task 3 Drama Activity : Focus on Speaking

Students are asked to divide the page into five equal parts. On the topmost part they draw the head of any creature, real or imaginary, fold that portion and pass it on to their neighbour. Now they are asked to draw the neck, trunk, legs and lowermost part of the body, in the same manner. Finally they open the page and choose two of the best creatures and write a dialogue between them. They then come to the front of the class and role play the dialogue.

[From Maley A & Duff A: Drama Techniques in Language Teaching p.164]

Task 4 : Focus on reading

Two stories involving characters with the same names are selected. The sentences in both stories are jumbled up and each student receives one sentence. As a group they have to sort out the two stories.

[From Challenge to Think by Frank, Rinvolucri and Berer, OUP 1982]